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REFLECTIONS

Esther Wells (seated) and likely Mary T. Wells — Cabinet Card c 1900
Photograph by Al. A. Simmons
Jeffrey Hunt August 9 2025

After reviewing dates and known family photographs, I believe the standing woman is most likely Mary T. Wells. If the photograph dates to circa 1900 — as supported by the cabinet card format, clothing styles, and the presence of contemporary books in the image — Esther Wells would have been about 48 years old. The standing woman appears roughly a decade younger, placing her birth around 1862–1863, which aligns with Mary T. Wells. By contrast, another sister, Flora Wells, born in 1855, would have been closer in age to Esther, making her a less likely match. Esther's daughters — Bertha, Millie, Lily, and Dolly — would have been in their teens or early twenties at the time, too young to match the woman's appearance here.

Several details help confirm the period. The book propped by the standing woman is *The 20th Century Speaker* (1898), with a portrait of a woman and two American flags on its cover. The seated woman holds a book that appears to bear a red cross symbol. Other visible volumes include *Our New Possessions* (1898), illustrated with the Statue of Liberty — a popular work in the wake of the Spanish–American War. Allowing time for distribution to Oregon, these publishing dates help place the photo in the 1899–1900 range.

The image itself may have been an "extra" print from the photographer — possibly an overexposed outtake — which could explain why it was not mounted in the main family album. It's not unusual for such loose photographs to have been borrowed or misplaced over the years. Should further examination of the album reveal a missing slot matching this image, it could be reinserted into its original album.

The standing woman also wears a distinctive upside-down horseshoe brooch. While horseshoes are traditionally worn upright to "hold in" good luck, the inverted style was sometimes chosen for personal or aesthetic reasons, and may have carried individual significance.

This portrait is part of the ongoing Dear Hunt Archive, documenting descendants of early Oregon pioneer families

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Mary T. Wells was born on August 4, 1863, in Douglas, Oregon, her father, Ira, was 49, and her mother, Anna, was 41. She had three brothers and seven sisters. She died on May 12, 1948, in Elkton, Oregon, at the age of 84.

Esther Wells was born on June 4, 1852, in Elkton, Oregon. Her father, Ira, was 37, and her mother, Anna, was 29. She married John Lewis Smith on September 17, 1870, in Yoncalla, Oregon. They had ten children in 14 years. She died on July 23, 1937, in Roseburg, Oregon, at the age of 85, and was buried in her hometown.

Mary or Flora Wells

Esther Wells